

Message Text

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ACTION HA-05

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 VO-05 CA-01
OMB-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00
ICAE-00 INRE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 PA-01
SP-02 SS-15 /085 W
-----011908 060910Z /20

O 051300Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1932
INFO AMCONSUL CAPETOWN
AMEMBASSY DARESSALAAM
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY LUSAKA IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY MAPUTO
AMEMBASSY PETORIA
USMISSION GENEVA IMMEDIATE
USMISSION USUN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 GABORONE 0927

CAPE TOWN FOR EMBASSY

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF, BC
SUBJECT: BOTSWANA: REFUGEE REPORT

1. SUMMARY: ACCORDING TO RED CROSS OFFICIAL AND CONFIRMED
BY UNHCR RESREP PERKINS, ZAPU-FINANCED CHARTER FLIGHTS
CARRYING REFUGEES FROM BOTSWANA TO ZAMBIA HAVE CEASED.
UNHCR-CONTRACTED FLIGHTS TO EVACUATE 3,000 REFUGEES IS
UNDERWAY. HOWEVER, THE RATE OF INFLUX OF REFUGEES CONTINUES
TO INCREASE ALARMINGLY. WITH AN END TO THE CHARTERS, PERKINS
ESTIMATES THE RHODESIAN REFUGEE CAMP POPULATION IN BOTSWANA
MIGHT REACH 20,000 BY THE END OF 1978. PERKINS SAID PLAN-
NING HAS BEGUN TO CONSTRUCT A NEW CAMP TO ACCOMMODATE BETWEEN
TEN TO TWENTY THOUSAND REFUGEES. HE THOUGHT THE GOB
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WOULD SOON ASK FOR USG FUNDS TO GET FLIGHTS GOING AGAIN.
ACTION REQUESTED: INFORMATION WITH WHICH TO RESPOND
TO RED CROSS INQUIRING ABOUT (A) HOW MANY REFUGEES
COULD BE CARED FOR BY MEDIUM-SIZED MOBILE FIELD HOS-
PITAL UNIT; (B) HOW MANY PERSONS ARE NEEDED TO MAN IT;
(C) COST, INCLUDING TRANSPORTATION; AND (D) HOW SUCH
A MOBILE FILE HOSPITAL UNIT COULD BEST BE TRANSPORTED

TO BOTSWANA GIVEN SHORT AIRPORT RUNWAYS. END SUMMARY.

2. AT SOCIAL OCCASION APRIL 3, LOCAL RED CROSS REP TOLD ME PRIVATELY THAT NEW INFLUX OF REFUGEES, COUPLED WITH CESSATION OF ZAPU-FINANCED CHARTER FLIGHTS, LED RED CROSS TO ESTIMATE THERE MAY SOON BE 20,000 REFUGEES IN BOTSWANA. RED CROSS REP BELIEVED CONTINGENCY PLANNING SHOULD BEGIN PROMPTLY -- ALTHOUGH GOB WAS "AS USUAL" SLOW TO REACT. AS A FIRST STEP RED CROSS REP WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT MOBILE FIELD HOSPITAL UNITS - HOW BIG THEY WERE, HOW MANY PERSONS REQUIRED TO OPERATE THEM, COST, ETC. I SAID WE WOULD INQUIRE.

3. UNHCR RES REP PERKINS CONFIRMED TO EMBOFF APRIL 4 REPORT OF RED CROSS REP THAT FLIGHTS BY CHARTERED AIRCRAFT OF RHODESIAN REFUGEES FROM SELEBI-PIKWE TO LUSAKA STOPPED APRIL 1 AS A RESULT OF THE ZAMBIAN GOVERNMENT'S REFUSAL TO GIVE ZAMBIAN AIRWAYS THE HARD CURRENCY IT REQUIRED IN ORDER TO EXTEND CREDIT FOR THE FLIGHTS TO THE PURCHASER, AIR BOTSWANA. REFERRING TO THE NEAR FINANCIAL INSOLVENCY OF THE ZAMBIAN GOVERNMENT AND ITS DESPERATE NEED FOR HARD CURRENCY, PERKINS SEEMED TO REGARD DISCONTINUATION OF THE CHARTER FLIGHTS AS LIKELY TO REMAIN IN EFFECT.

4. AT THE SAME TIME PERKINS SAID THAT THE UNHCR-CONFIDENTIAL

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TRACTED CHARTER AIR LIFT OF 3,000 REFUGEES (SEE GABORONE 601) WAS PROGRESSING SATISFACTORILY AT THE DAILY RATE OF THREE FLIGHTS AND CARRYING A TOTAL OF 168 PEOPLE. TO DATE 702 OF THE THREE THOUSAND HAVE BEEN REMOVED TO LUSAKA. THE AIR LIFT, NOW SEVEN DAYS UNDERWAY, WOULD CONTINUE FOR SEVERAL MORE WEEKS. PERKINS IMPLIED, HOWEVER, THAT UNHCR AIR LIFT WAS A ONE-TIME PHENOMENON AND THAT NO FUNDS WERE AVAILABLE FOR FURTHER FLIGHTS.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 GABORONE 0927

CAPE TWON FOR EMBASSY

5. NOTING THAT THE CHARTERS HAD STOPPED, THE INFLUX OF REFUGEES HAD SUDDENLY INCREASED (SEE GABORONE 761) AND THAT THE PREVIOUS WEEK THERE WERE 1100 REFUGEES IN FRANCISTOWN AND 4,700 IN SELEBI-PIKWE, PERKINS CONCLUDED THAT THE UNHCR TRANSPORT OF THE THREE THOUSAND REFUGEES WOULD NOT HAVE THE LARGE IMPACT ORIGINALLY FORESEEN. CONSEQUENTLY, A UNHCR CONTINGENCY PLAN (STILL IN DRAFT, ACCORDING TO PERKINS) WOULD GO PARTIALLY INTO EFFECT. THE GOB HAD JUST (BELATEDLY AFTER MONTHS OF DELIBERATION AND STALLING) TAKEN THE DECISION TO PROVIDE LAND FOR THE PERMANENT HOUSING OF BETWEEN 10,000 AND 20,000 REFUGEES. ON APRIL 5 PERKINS SAID HE WOULD TRAVEL SOME 50 MILES NORTHWEST OF FRANCISTOWN TO CHECK A SITE FOR THIS NEW CAMP. THE CAMP, WHICH WOULD INCLUDE A CLINIC, ADMINIS-
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TRATIVE BLOCK, STORE HOUSES AND DORMITORIES, COULD BE DEVELOPED INTO A RURAL SETTLEMENT SIMILAR TO THAT DESIGNED IN 1969 FOR THE ANGOLAN REFUGEES NEAR CAPRIVI STRIP (NORTH WEST DISTRICT).

6. PERKINS CONSIDERED THAT THE CAMP COULD BE READY IN FOUR TO FIVE MONTHS. HE THOUGHT IT QUITE POSSIBLE THAT, GIVEN THE CONTINUATION OF THE PRESENT REFUGEE INFLUX AND THE ABSENCE OF CHARTER FLIGHTS, BOTSWANA MIGHT HAVE TO ABSORB AS MANY AS 20,000 REFUGEES BY THE END OF 1978. UNTIL THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CAMP WAS COMPLETED, A BREATHING SPACE WAS NEEDED TO ACCOMMODATE THE INFLUX.

HE ASKED WHETHER THE UNITED STATES WOULD HELP FINANCE CONTINUATION OF THE CHARTER FLIGHTS. EMBOFF SAID THAT WASHINGTON CONSIDERATION OF SUCH A REQUEST WOULD BE FACILITATED BY KEEPING IT IN MULILATERAL CHANNELS.

7. WHEN EMBOFF ASKED PERKINS HOW HE INTENDED TO FEED AND ACCOMMODATE THE REFUGEES IN THE CAMP, PERKINS SAID ONLY THAT HIS CONTINGENCY PLAN COVERED EVERYTHING TO INCLUDE FOOD AND CLOTHING.

8. COMMENT: AS DEPARTMENT IS AWARE, ANTICIPATED INCREASES OF RHODESIAN REFUGEES (SEE PARA 6) PRESENT GOB WITH BOTH A FINANCIAL BURDEN AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, WITH AN ADDED SECURITY PROBLEM WHICH HAS SEVERAL ASPECTS: (A) THE REFUGEES, MOST OF WHOM ARE PF RECRUITS AND FIGHTERS, MUST BE ROUNDED UP, PROCESSED AND EFFECTIVELY CONFINED IF NORTHERN BOTSWANA IS NOT TO BECOME A THEATER FOR GUERRILLA ACTIONS; (B) WITH ITS MINISCULE DEFENSE FORCE, BOTSWANA CANNOT EFFECTIVELY CONTROL THE AREA, ESPECIALLY IF NUMBERS OF REFUGEES REACH PROPORTIONS NOW ANTICIPATED; AND (C) IN ABSENCE OF A CEASEFIRE IN
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RHODESIA, PRESENCE OF PF GUERRILLAS AND RECRUITS, EVEN IF CONFINED, COULD INVITE RHODESIAN STRIKES.

10. FOR REASONS OF ECONOMICS AND SECURITY, THE OBVIOUS PREFERENCE OF THE GOB IS NOT TO BUILD A MASSIVE CAMP FOR RHODESIANS, BUT TO PASS THEM ON TO ZAMBIA AS HERETOFORE (PROVIDED THAT ZAMBIA WILL STILL TAKE THEM). FUNDS CONTRIBUTED TO UNHCR TO HELP PREVENT A REFUGEE BUILDUP HERE (WE UNDERSTAND THAT WOMEN AND CHILDREN CONSTITUTE FORTY PERCENT OF THE TOTAL) WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY CONTRIBUTE TO REGIONAL STABILITY BY ISOLATING BOTSWANA FROM THE RHODESIAN WAR ON HER BORDER.

11. PERKINS' VAGUE ASSURANCES (PARA 7) TO EMBOFF'S INQUIRY ON AVAILABILITY OF SUPPLIES FOR A NEW CAMP ARE CHARACTERISTIC AND COULD SOON TURN INTO IMPASSIONED PLEA FOR HELP. EMBASSY DOES NOT INTEND TO GET OUT IN FRONT OF UNHCR, ICRC AND GOB ON SUBJECT OF SUPPLIES; HOWEVER, WE AGREE WITH RED CROSS OFFICIAL THAT IT IS TIME TO DEVELOP CONTINGENCY PLANS.

12 ACTION REQUESTED: INFORMATION ASAP ON (A) THE ESTIMATED NUMBER OF PERSONS WHO CAN BE CARED FOR BY A MEDIUM-SIZED MOBILE FIELD HOSPITAL UNIT; (B) THE AVAILABILITY OF A UNIT FOR SHIPMENT TO BOTSWANA; (C) DATA ON VOLUME, COST (INCLUDING TRANSPORTATION), NUMBER OF PERSONS REQUIRED TO TO OPERATE IT, AND (D) HOW SUCH

A UNIT MIGHT MOST EXPEDITIOUSLY BE SENT HERE GIVEN SHORT
RUNWAYS AT ALL AIRPORTS IN BOTSWANA.
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